20 Ways to Show Off

By Sheikh Salman b. Fahd al-Oadah
General Supervisor of the IslamToday Website

INTRODUCTION

Praise be to Allah; we praise Him, seek His forgiveness, and turn to Him in repentance. We seek refuge with Him from the evils of our souls and the evils of our deeds. Whomever Allah guides, none can misguide, and whomever Allah leads astray, none can guide. I bear witness that there is no god but Allah alone without partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger.

Allah created the human being and exalted him above all other creatures. First of all, He gave him the most perfect physical form. Allah says: "Truly, We have created the human being in the best of forms." [*Sûrah al-Tîn*: 4] Nothing in Creation comes close to the human being in the perfection and harmony of its form and the excellence of the parts of its body.

Then Allah exalted the human being with something far greater, something that clearly sets him apart from all other things in existence. He graced him with the gift of reason and the honor of being directly accountable to his Lord. Hence, Allah speaks to us directly in the *Qur'ân*, saying: "O human being!" Allah is not addressing merely our bodies, but our minds and souls. This is why a person who is insane is not held accountable in Islamic Law. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "The pen has been lifted from three: a sleeping person until he awakens, a small child until he matures, and an insane person until he comes to his senses."[1]

It is clear to all sensible people that the gifts of reason and true humanity, and the honor of direct accountability before Allah are the greatest blessings that Allah has bestowed upon mankind. Allah, from above the seven heavens, calls out to us and addresses us directly. Surpassing all of these honors is the fact that Allah chose His Messengers from our kind. Allah says: "Allah did confer a great favor on the believers when He sent among them a Messenger from among themselves." [*Sûrah Âl `Imrân*: 164]

The greatest honor that Allah has conferred upon humanity is our direct accountability to Him, and the highest expression of this accountability is to worship Allah with true sincerity and devotion. Therefore, we shall discuss in this short treatise a great threat to that sincerity. This threat is the human tendency to show off.

[1] *Musnad Ahmad* (24173, 24182, 24590). *Sunan Abî Dâwûd* (4398). *Sunan al-Nasâ'î* (3432). *Ibn Mâjah* (2041). These narrations are all from `Â'ishah, and there are other chains of transmission from other Companions. The *hadîth* is authentic (*sahîh*).

Our discussion will be divided into two chapters:

1. The first chapter will discuss inward and outward aspects of worship.

2. The second chapter will discuss the problem of showing off and investigate twenty ways that this ignoble quality can creep up on a person.

I ask Allah to bless us to be able to avoid this problem and save us from our tendency to show off. I ask him to make this short treatise beneficial to the people. Truly Allah is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.

CHAPTER ONE
Inward and Outward Aspects of Worship

Allah created the human being, his most noble creation, to worship Him. Allah says: "I did not create the *Jinn* and humanity except to worship Me." [*Sûrah al-Dhâriyât*: 56]

Worship is any lawful activity by which a person seeks Allah's pleasure. It may be an act of formal worship that is only done for Allah's sake and never for worldly gain, like the prescribed prayers, the fast, payment of alms, or the pilgrimage. It may also be a lawful, mundane act like engaging in business, agriculture, manufacture, study, or employment, if such an activity is pursued sincerely, honorably, in the best manner, and with the hope of attaining Allah's pleasure. In this way, the most mundane acts can earn Allah's reward.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "There is the reward of giving charity when you approach your wives."

The Companions were startled by this and said: "O Messenger of Allah! When one of us fulfills his desires, he receives a reward for it?'

The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied: "Can you see that if you approached a woman in a forbidden manner, you would be punished for it? Likewise, when you approach your wife in a lawful manner, you receive a reward for it."

Outward Aspects of Worship

Every limb of the body has some act of worship to perform. Let us take the eyes as an example. The eyes worship Allah by looking at what they are commanded to look at. Allah says:

"Will they not look at the kingdom of the heavens and the Earth." [*Sûrah al-A`râf*: 185]

"Say: Travel through the Earth and look upon what was the end of those who rejected faith." [*Sûrah al-An`âm*: 11]

Using the gift of sight can be an act of worship. It is worship to look upon the Creation of Allah and marvel at its perfection. It is worship to use one's eyes to read and acquire knowledge.

The ears also have their designated acts of worship. They are used to listen to what pleases Allah, like the recitation of the *Qur'ân*, the remembrance of His name, and the acquisition of knowledge. This is why Allah says: "Surely the hearing, the sight, the heart, all of these shall be questioned." [*Sûrah al-Isrâ'*: 36]

The Prophet (peace be upon him) has told us that Allah says: "My servant continues to come closer to me with voluntary acts of worship until I love him, and if I love him, I become his hearing by which he hears, and his sight by which he sees."[2] – meaning that he hears and sees only what is pleasing to Allah.

The hands have their worship to do as well. They give in charity and engage in numerous good works. They are used for the prevention of evil. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Whoever amongst you sees something wrong being done, he should change it with his hands. If he cannot do that, then with his tongue. If he cannot do that, then at least in his heart, and this is the weakest of faith."[3] Greeting ones brethren and shaking hands with them is worship, since this wipes away sins and purifies the heart.

The same can be said for all physical exertions made for the sake of Allah, like fighting to defend the faith against the enemies of Islam.

A believing woman is no different than a man in this respect. Her acts of worship are by her own hands. Moreover, her taking care of her children and all the work that she does in the home can be added to her list of good deeds. These activities fall under obedience to Allah. They are a means of attaining nearness to Him as well as a way of pleasing her husband.

Even the feet have there share of worship designated to them. With them, the worshipper walks to the daily prayers at the mosque and the Friday prayer. Allah says: "Verily We shall give life to the dead and We shall record that which they send forward and the traces they leave behind." [*Sûrah YâSîn*: 12]

When the tribe of Banû Salamah wished to relocate in order to be closer to the Mosque, the Prophet (peace be upon him) told them to stay at their present homes, explaining to them that every step they take while walking to the mosque is recorded with Allah, saying: "Your homes record the traces you leave behind."[4]

And Allah describes in the *Qur'ân* how this recording takes place "...in a Book wherein my Lord never errs nor forgets." [*Sûrah TâHâ*: 52]

[2] *Sahîh al-Bukhârî* (6502).
[3] *Sahîh Muslim* (49).
[4] *Sahîh Muslim* (665).

Allah also says: "It is He who made the Earth traversable, so walk through its tracts…" [*Sûrah al-Mulk*: 15] Traversing the Earth to ponder over the lessons to be found therein is worship which the feet can engage in.

Just as the devotions of the limbs are mentioned, so are their sins. The sin of the eyes is for them to gaze upon forbidden things. The sin of the ears is for them to listen to backbiting, slander, calumny, curses, music, and whatever else displeases Allah. The sin of the tongue is for it to utter lies, to backbite, slander, and curse, and to ridicule the believers. The sin of the hands is for them to steal, abuse others, and transgress against the Muslims. The sin of the feet is for them to walk towards sin, whether it be in the home, the marketplace, or a foreign land. All of these are sins of the limbs.

Look how Ma`n b. `Aws boasts in verse how he has safeguarded his limbs from sin, neither stretching his hands toward sin, nor letting his feet carry him towards disobeying Allah:

Upon your life! I never stretched my hand towards a dubious affair,
Nor have my feet ever carried me towards denigration.

Neither has my hearing nor my sight guided me there,
Nor have my thoughts or ideas brought me hither.

I know that no affliction has ever befallen me
That has not afflicted a young man in times gone by.

The tongue is one of the greatest appendages possessed by the human being, since its devotions include such noble activities as the remembrance and praise of Allah, the recitation of the *Qur'ân*, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong.

From all of this, we can see why the formal prayers are one of the greatest forms of worship, since these prayers require devotions from every limb of the body.

The eyes engage in worship by fixing their gaze upon the spot where the forehead will be placed during prostration.

The ears engage in worship during prayer by listening to the recitation of the imam with silent concentration. Allah says: "While the *Qur'ân* is being recited, listen to it attentively and silently that perhaps you might receive mercy." [*Sûrah al-A`râf*: 204]

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "When the imam is reciting, listen to him quietly."[5]

[5] *Sahîh Muslim* (404).

The arms and legs engage in worship when the person performing prayer stands, bows, prostrates, and sits. The tongue engages in worship by remembering and glorifying Allah and by reciting the *Qur'ân*.

In this way the whole body humbles itself before Allah and engages in His worship, making prayer one of the greatest forms of devotion.

It is therefore, remarkable, that in spite of the tremendous virtues of prayer, Allah has directed the following threat to some of the people who pray when He says: "So woe to the people who pray, but who are inattentive about their prayers; those who but want to be seen of others but refuse to supply even neighborly needs." [*Sûrah al-Mâ`ûn*: 4-7]

This lets us know that what matters is not merely the outward motions of prayer, since the people that are being addressed by these verses are described as people who perform their prayers. Though they pray, they are threatened with woe, meaning that they will face punishment in the Hereafter. This is because they only performed the prayers with their bodies while there hearts were devoid of humility and devotion. Their bodies were lined up in the mosques in the ranks of the worshippers. Their faces were turned towards Mecca. Their hearts, however, were directed towards something else, longing only to achieve the praise of men and win their trust or to attain some other worldly benefit.

Allah describes these people in the following words: "When they stand up to prayer, they stand lazily to be seen of men, but little do they remember Allah." [*Sûrah al-Nisâ'*: 142]

Inward Aspects of Worship

We now turn our intention to the greater, more important facets of worship, the internal ones – the devotions of the heart and of the inner self. Allah says: "Set your face to the religion in true sincerity." [*Sûrah al-Rûm*: 30] To direct oneself to Allah, to rely on Him alone, and to seek his countenance through one's deeds is the greatest form of worship there is. It is what purifies and beautifies the heart. It is accomplished through the love of Allah and a constant awareness of Him. This is the distinction that the believers have over the sinners and the hypocrites.

Just like a person takes care of his outward appearance, wears nice clothes, and worries about public tastes in his manner of grooming, he should also take care to beautify his inner being. And just as he would hate to go out in public in a disheveled state, he should also be aware that the corruption of his inner being is far more odious.

A poet once said:

A man will not with his tasteful attire endear himself to the one he has wronged
Any more than a cadaver is enamored of the finery of his burial clothes.

A beautiful funeral dressing is of no benefit to the deceased. Likewise, a person who possesses an evil, envious, hateful nature does not get any benefit from his good outward gestures. This is the lot of the hypocrite.

A poet writes:

O servant of the flesh! How wretched you grow from your service.
How you have wearied yourself in your fruitless labors.

Turn to your soul and labor to perfect its virtues,
For you are by virtue of your soul, not your flesh, a man.

A person does not become a true and noble human being on account of his physical strength. If this were the case, then many a beast of burden or beast of prey would attain the highest nobility and most sublime humanity. This is why the bodies of men and women are not the measure of their worth.

Inspired by this fact, a poet writes:

You regard a man emaciated and scorn him,
While in his garments is the epithet of a lion.

You are impressed by the well groomed man and test his mettle,
Only to be disappointed by this man of impeccable appearance.

The camel is of great size, but without any ken,
So his great bulk ultimately avails you not.

The puniest of birds has the largest number of chicks,
While the she falcon scarcely has any chicks at all.

Size and quantity are not all that matters, nor is a good outward show. What matters most is the heart. If the heart is pure, the body follows, but if the heart is rotten, the whole body is corrupted. The most pious Muslim, Abû Bakr, was a lightweight, slender man, but in spite of that, if his faith were weighed against the combined faith of all the Muslims, his faith would weigh more.

Then there was `Abd Allah b. Mas`ûd who was one of the dearest people to the Allah. The Companion Hudhayfah b. al-Yamân said: "Those among the Companions who possessed reliable kowledge all knew that Ibn Mas`ûd was the closest and dearest of them to Allah."[6] Now, Ibn Mas`ûd was extremely slight of build, actually puny, and his shins were very skinny. He was so small that the wind would cause him to sway to and fro. The Companion Zur b. Hubaysh relates that Ibn Mas`ûd was harvesting branches from an arâk tree when the wind came up and caused his whole body to turn. People began to

[6] *Sahîh al-Bukhârî* (3762). *Sunan al-Tirmidhî* (3806). The wording here is that of al-Tirmidhî.

laugh at him, and Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) asked: "What are you laughing at?" They replied that they were laughing at his skinny legs. To this the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "I swear by the One who possesses my soul! Those two legs are weightier in the Balance of the Hereafter than Mount Uhud."[7]

Just as there are people who pay careful attention to their appearances but are neglectful of their inner selves, there are those who keep up a good image by doing supposedly pious acts conspicuously and who are careful never to slip because of their fear of public recrimination. Any slip would ruin their reputation, because their status is built upon their being good imams, scholars, or Islamic workers. For this reason they are scrupulous in maintaining their outwardly good conduct, but not out of any real desire to follow the *Sunnah* or obey Allah. Their hearts are full of the love of this world and the love of fame. They are so concerned about their status and their reputation that they have no time to think about the Hereafter and how they should prepare for it. They have no time to think about the problems afflicting the Muslims and how to solve them. They do not think about calling others to Islam. Their hearts are devoid of the love of Allah and the love of his devoted worshippers. They also feel no fear of Allah. They do not hope for his reward. Their hearts, which are the receptacles of love, hate, hope, anger, joy, and sorrow, are not focused on the worship of Allah at all.

Allah describes the unbelievers in the following way: "This is because they followed that which displeased Allah and they hated to please Him, so He made their deeds of no effect." [*Sûrah Muhammad*: 28] We can see how the heart is the crux of all matters. So what is the value of outwardly good works that are hated by the heart of the one who performs them? What is the state of a person who abstains from some sinful deed while loving it in his heart and feeling joy when someone else commits it? Such a person will almost invariably fall into the sin sooner or later.

Such a person who loves what Allah hates and hates what Allah loves will without doubt act upon what is in his heart. The love or fear that he has harbors in his heart for some created thing – the fear that he has of men, of sickness, of poverty, of death, or of the rulers and the desire that he has for worldly gain, for prestige, or for a position – will ultimately guide his hands just as a king guides his subjects. His actions will obey the directions of his heart. This is why the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "In the body is a peace of flesh that if it is healthy, the whole body is healthy, and if it is corrupted, the whole body becomes corrupted. It is the heart."[8]

The heart dictates and the limbs obey. This is why Allah has made salvation in the Hereafter dependent upon the sanctity of the heart. Allah says: "The Day wherein neither wealth nor sons will prevail, except for him who brings to Allah a sound heart." [*Sûrah al-Shu`arâ'*: 88-89] So the one who brings to Allah a sound heart will find benefit in his wealth, his children, and his deeds, for his limbs would have already availed him. As for the one who comes to Allah with a heart that is dead or sick, he will find no benefit in anything else.

[7] *Musnad Ahmad* (3991). *Sunan Abî Ya`lâ* (5310). *Mu`jam al-Tabaranî* (8452).
[8] *Sahîh al-Bukhârî* (52). *Sahîh Muslim* (1599).

A person whose heart is devoid of the love and fear of Allah, a heart which has no affection for pious people and no love for righteous deeds, is to Allah a person who has no heart, even if the lump of flesh can be found in his chest. Allah says: "Not alike are the living and the dead." [*Sûrah Fâtir*: 22] The comparison here is between a believer and an unbeliever or between a pious person and a sinner.

Allah says: "Can he who was dead, to whom We then gave life and a light whereby he can walk among the people be like him who is in the depths of darkness from which he cannot escape?" [*Sûrah al-An`âm*: 122]

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "The likeness of two people, one who remembers his Lord and one who does not, is that of the living and the dead."[9]

Allah says: "Verily in this is a message for any that has a heart." [*Sûrah Qâf*: 37]

All of this confirms a great truth that we must acknowledge: that the purity of the heart and sincerity of purpose are the basis upon which all of a person's works must rest. If the heart becomes corrupted, good deeds are of no avail. When a person's intention is no good, nobility of purpose is lost and the person swerves from what is right. When the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Actions are but by intentions", he was talking about all actions. The acceptability of any outward action is contingent on the intention behind it, as the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "…and every person will have only what he intended." Actions of the heart, however, are a different matter. The heart's deeds such as fear, hope, and love, differ from outward actions in that they, being unseen by others, are not subject to the risk of being for show. They either happen for the sake of Allah or they do not happen at all. One of the distinguishing features of the actions of the heart is that they can be cause for reward even if the person possessing them does not perform any outward act.

When the Prophet (peace be upon him) was approaching Madinah on his return from the Battle of Tabûk, he said to his Companions: "In Madinah there are some people who did not travel nor did they even cross a valley, but they were with you."

His Companions asked him: "O Messenger of Allah! While they were in Madinah?"

He replied: "Yes, while they were in Madinah and were prevented by circumstances."[10]

This idea was expressed by a poet who wrote:

O you who traveled to the Ancient House! It is thus,
That you went in body while we went in spirit.

We were prevented by hardships we had to endure,
And thus we are like the ones who went forward.

[9] *Sahîh al-Bukhârî* (6407). *Sahîh Muslim* (779).
[10] *Sahîh al-Bukhârî* (4423).

The Prophet (peace be upon him) mentioned that there will be people who will enter Paradise who did not do good works because they were prevented from doing so. Abû Hurayrah used to ask his peers to tell him about a man who went to Paradise after never having prayed a day in his life. When they could not answer, he would mention to them al-Usayrim from the tribe of Banû `Abd al-Ashhal.[11]

Al-Usayrim was a man who refused to accept Islam when the rest of his people did so. On the day of the Battle of Uhud, he came to accept Islam. Then he picked up his sword and went out to join the battle along with his people. He fought until he was mortally wounded. After the battle, when the tribe of Banû `Abd al-Ashhal began looking for their dead, they found al-Usayrim on the verge of death. They were surprised because they had left him behind.

They asked him: "What brought you here, your love for your people or a desire for Islam?"

He replied: "My desire for Islam brought me here. I believe in Allah and his Messenger so I accepted Islam. Then I picked up my sword and went forward with Allah's Messenger and fought until I came to this."

He died shortly thereafter. They mentioned this to Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) who said: "He is among the inhabitants of Paradise."[12]

Showing Off as a Way of Destroying One's Deeds

A person can receive great rewards from Allah on account of his good intentions alone, even if he is prevented from carrying out the intended deed. On the other hand, the deeds that he performs can become bereft of blessings if they are not accompanied by a good intention. Such deeds can actually be sinful.

There are many *hadîth* that warn us against destroying our good deeds. Showing off is one of the most serious causes of our deeds going to waste.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) relates to us that Allah will say: "Go to those who used to show off in the world and see if they found their reward."[13]

He also relates that Allah says: "I am in no need of partners. Whoever does a deed for the sake of others as well as me, I leave his deed for those others."[14]

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "A man will be brought forward on the Day of Resurrection and thrown into the Fire. His entrails will come forth from his throat and he

[11] *Musnad Ahmad* (23634).
[12] Al-Haythamî, *Majma` al-Zawâ'id* (9/362). Al-Haythamî states that all of its narrators are trustworthy (*thiqât*).
[13] *Musnad Ahmad* (23119, 27442).
[14] *Sahîh Muslim* (2985).

will hang from them going around like a donkey goes around a mill. The inhabitants of the Fire will gather around him and ask: 'What is with you? Didn't you used to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong?' He will reply: 'Yes, I used to enjoin what is right but not do those things myself, and I used to forbid what is wrong but not refrain from them myself.'"[15]

Some people might get the idea that this man was punished because he enjoined what is right and forbade what is wrong while he had many shortcomings in his own deeds. This is a big mistake, because the task of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong is inherently worthy of reward as long as the person engaged in it is sincere and has the right intention. This man was being punished because he did the very evil deeds he forbade others from doing and spurned the very duties he called others towards. He was merely beautifying his outward conduct while his inner being remained corrupt. His punishment was for his sins, not because he enjoined what is right and forbade what is wrong.

As for the verse: "Do you enjoin right conduct on others and forget to practice it yourselves and yet you recite the Scripture? Do you not have any sense?" [*Sûrah al-Baqarah*: 44], it means that Allah rebukes them and punishes them because they turned away from the truth though they knew it full well. This makes them different from those who are ignorant of the truth, who if they come to know it would most likely follow it.

Therefore, we should know that enjoining what is right is something we owe to the people, even if we fail to do what is right ourselves. The same goes for forbidding what is wrong. A poet once said:

If no sinner exhorts others to righteousness,
Then who will exhort the sinners after Muhammad?

No one after Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) is divinely protected from committing sins. It is, however, the duty upon every person to accomplish the following four things:

1. To do what is right.
2. To enjoin others to what is right.
3. To abstain from what is wrong.
4. To forbid others from doing wrong.

Failure to perform one of these four duties does not give us the right to neglect any of the others. Therefore, someone who commits a sin still has the duty to call others to avoid it.

Showing off in words and deeds is a sickness that can get a person thrown into the Hellfire. Such a person, on the outside, appears to be righteous. His concern for what others think of him earns him the reward of their high esteem but not the pleasure of Allah. The praise of the people is sufficient for him.

[15] *Sahîh Muslim* (2989).

This is the type of hypocricy that the earliest Muslims were afraid of falling into. Al-Hasan al-Basrî said, speaking about the tendency to show off: "I swear by Him in whose hand is my soul. No one feels safe from it except for a hypocrite and no one fears it except for a believer." They were afraid that it would creep unnoticed into their deeds as Allah says: "…lest your deeds become vain and you perceive it not." [*Sûrah al-Hujurât*: 2][16]

Al-Bukhârî placed in his *Sahîh* a chapter entitled: "A person being afraid that his deeds will become vain while not perceiving it". In this chapter, he mentions a *hadîth* related by Anas b. Mâlik that Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) inquired of the whereabouts of Thâbit b. Qays. A man said he would go and find out about him. The man found Thâbit sitting in his house with his head hanging down.

The man asked : "What is the matter with you?"

Thâbit replied: "It is very bad. A person used to raise his voice above the voice of the Prophet (peace be upon him) so his deeds have become vain and he is now one of the people of the Fire."

The man returned to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and informed him of what Thâbit had said. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said to the man: "Go back to him and say to him: 'You are not from the people of the Fire but from the People of Paradise'."[17]

CHAPTER TWO
Twenty Ways to Show Off

Since the tendency to show off is so dangerous, we must be very wary of it and know its causes and the ways that it can come about. With this in mind, we will discuss twenty different ways that this tendency to show off can manifest itself.

1. Publicizing one's good deeds:

Some people go around intentionally taking about the things they have done, boasting about their virtues. They cannot sit with others without saying: "I did this and I did that… I spent so much in charity." Sometimes they can be a bit more subtle, saying things like: "Actually, I cannot stay up in prayer at night more than two hours…" or: "Unfortunately, I cannot cope with fasting every day, so I must suffice with fasting on Mondays and Thursdays…" In this way, they want to show others just how much they are praying and fasting.

They only publicize their good works and make sure to perform them in front of others in order to earn the people's praise. This is why it is preferable for most acts of worship to

[16] The entire verse reads: "O you who believe, raise not your voices above the voice of the Prophet nor speak aloud to him in talk as you may speak aloud to one another, lest your deeds become vain and you perceive it not."
[17] *Sahîh al-Bukhârî* (3613). *Sahîh Muslim* (119).

be done in private. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “O people! Pray in your homes, for truly the best prayers are those that a person prays at home, with the exception of the prescribed prayers.”[18] It is, therefore, preferable for voluntary prayers to be made in the privacy of one’s own home. This protects the worshiper from the whispers of Satan and makes certain that the prayers are not being performed for show. It also prevents the home from becoming like a graveyard where no prayers are made. A further benefit of praying at home is that it impresses upon the children of the house the importance of prayer. However, voluntary prayers that are supposed to be made in congregation are an exception to this rule, like the eclipse prayers, the prayer for rain, the *Tarâwîh* prayer, and the two *`Îd* prayers (if we deem the *`Îd* prayers to be voluntary).

The same goes for charity. Allah says: “If you make public your charity, it is well, but if you conceal it and give it to the poor, then it is better for you.” [*Sûrah al-Baqarah*: 271] A person should always give charity in secret and not give it publicly unless he can make sure not to fall into showing off and sees that making it public will bring about some greater good. Sometimes public charity can encourage others by example. In the case of spending on the war effort, it can make the enemy cower.

Some people do charitable works publicly to get their names printed in the papers or to receive official recognition for their works. If the intention of such individuals is to garner more public support for the charitable efforts in question, then it is good. Otherwise, it is merely showing off. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “Actions are but by intentions, and every person will only get what he intended.”[19] Allah says: “Whether you hide your words or make them known, He certainly has full knowledge of what is in the hearts. Should He who created not know, and He is the Subtle, the Aware?” [*Sûrah al-Mulk*: 13-14]

2. Making false claims:

There is a type of person who likes to boast about things he never did. He may claim that he struggled for Islam with patience and forbearance. He may even claim to have suffered persecution and hardships in the path of Allah. If he meets someone who does not know about his past, he goes on to tell him: “I used to do this and I used to say that…”, speaking about a past more embroidered than true.

This person goes on like this in front of others in order to earn a reputation for himself. This behavior is worse than the one we have just gotten through discussing, since it combines between two evils: showing off and lying. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “A person who claims to be given things he has never been given is a double liar.”[20]

One trick is for a person to leave his own country and go to another so he can pass himself off to them as some great martyr by embroidering tales about himself.

[18] *Sahîh al-Bukhârî* (731).
[19] *Sahîh al-Bukhârî* (1).
[20] *Sahîh al-Bukhârî* (5219). *Sahîh Muslim* (2130).

A poet wrote:

Claims not backed by solid proofs
Turn their claimants into braggarts.

Then there is the poser who wishes to pass himself off as a learned person. He claims that he spent years studying with a certain sheikh and that he was one of his nearest and dearest disciples.

I know a person who claims that he memorized the *Qur`ân* with its seven different styles of recitation. He would say to people: "I learned from a number of sheikhs" then go on to mention the names of the leading scholars of our time. I know this person, and I know he cannot even read the *Qur'ân* properly from a book, forget about his reciting it by heart or knowing different styles of recitation.

Some people, though, are more insidious than that. There is the person who speaks about the scholars of our time – especially those among them who have died – as if they were his colleagues, not his teachers. This person will tell you anecdotes about those sheiks as if he had experienced them firsthand. In this way, he is trying to fabricate a relationship between himself and these sheikhs that does not exist. This is a sickness of the heart that becomes only more horrendous when it afflicts those who are supposed to be people of knowledge.

3. Becoming a show-off after having been sincere:

A person begins doing something for the sake of Allah alone, like offering prayer, spending in charity, or glorifying Allah in an audible voice. Then he realizes that people can see him. This makes him do even more. He prays a little longer, spends a little more, or glorifies Allah with even greater eloquence. When a person finds himself in this situation, he should fight against the urge to show off. He should say what the Prophet (peace be upon him) taught Abû Bakr to say to ward it off: "O Allah! I seek refuge with you from associating partners with you knowingly and I seek your forgiveness for what I do unknowingly."[21]

If the intention to show off establishes itself in his heart and he continues to increase his efforts to impress the people, then his works will fall under one of the two following outcomes:

If his deeds were of a nature that they could be divided into separate acts, then he will be rewarded for what he did for the sake of Allah and will be sinful for what he did to show off to the people. For example, a person gives two hundred pounds in charity. The first hundred he gave sincerely for Allah's sake. The second hundred he gave to impress the people. He will be rewarded for the first hundred and be sinful for the second.

[21] Al-Bukhârî, *Adab al-Mufrid* (716). Al-Hakîm al-Tirmidhî, *Nawâdir al-`Usûl* (4/142).

If his deed was of a kind that cannot be divided, like a single prayer, then his showing off nullifies the deed in its entirety.

Some people fall victim to the opposite affliction. They become so scared of showing off that they avoid performing good deeds because of it. They have jumped from the frying pan into the fire, so to speak.

True sincerity is to be concerned with Allah and to disregard the people altogether, neither performing deeds because of them nor abstaining from deeds on their account.

This brings us to the fourth way of showing off:

4. Abandoning deeds because of the people:

Al-Fudayl b. `Iyâd had harsh words for those who abandoned performing good works because of the people. He said: "Abandoning deeds because of the people *is* showing off. Performing deed for their sake is polytheism. Sincerity is where Allah protects you from both."

Some people go to the mosque. Then when they get there and see the people there, they become afraid of showing off. They start to come to the mosque late because of this and might sometimes miss the prayer altogether. This becomes their habit. Coming to the mosque early becomes one of the most difficult things for them to do.

Some people who read or memorize the *Qur'ân*, when they see that others are listening to them, become afraid of showing off. They stop reading the *Qur'ân*. This is tragic, especially when the people who do so are among those who have memorized the *Qur'ân* or who teach it to others.

Abandoning one's good deeds is a grave error. What the worshipper must do is cease to worry about created beings altogether, neither performing anything for their sake nor abstaining from anything for their sake.

One of the reasons for this behavior is that the person who is supposed to perform a given deed has an exaggerated view of his own importance and the importance of what he is about to do. He may have to give the Friday sermon or give a small talk after prayer where he can encourage what is right and discourage what is wrong. He begins to imagine that what he is doing is some great deed and that people will start quoting his words. Maybe he thinks that what he has to say will become the talk of the town. He may become a bit impressed with himself at this point, and here is where he starts to fear showing off. He sees the only way to play it safe is not to talk and not to act.

This is one of the devil's tricks. The only way for a person to stay immune to it is to accustom himself to doing good deeds and to see those deeds as small and insignificant when he does them. He must at the same time accustom himself to not attaching any importance to what people say. He must be able to recognize his own faults and realize

the shortcomings in his works. Then, when someone offers him unwelcome praise, it will not harm him in any way. Such praise will then be as the Prophet (peace be upon him) described it: "…glad tidings being presented to the believer early."[22]

5. Making worship noticeable in a subtle way:

A person might conceal his worship, or at least seem to be doing so, while making sure people know about it in a roundabout way. For example, a man might be busy with praising Allah or seeking his forgiveness. He keeps his remembrances quiet, but he moves his lips in a conspicuous manner so that anyone who sees him will know that he is engaged in the remembrance of his Lord. He might even raise his voice once in a while ever so slightly to bring attention to himself. What he desires is for people to praise him for what he is doing. Actions are but by intentions, and every person will have only what he intended. Therefore, if a person inadvertently draws attention to himself, not meaning to show off, then there will be no harm. However, if he does something ever so subtle with the intention of drawing attention to himself, then he has not only showed off but made a pretense of sincerity while doing so. And Allah says: "Whether you hide your words or make them known, He certainly has full knowledge of what is in the hearts. Should He who created not know, and He is the Subtle, the Aware?" [*Sûrah al-Mulk*: 13-14]

A person, when food is presented to him, abstains from it and says: "Today is Thursday" as if to imply that he always fasts on Thursdays. The Prophet (peace be upon him) instructed us that when food is presented to us, we should eat it if we are not fasting, and if we are fasting, we should make a small prayer for the one who offered us.[23] A good prayer would be something like: "May Allah bless you in your food and drink and in what Allah provides for you."

6. Conspicuous humility:

A person might make a show of deprecating himself, stating all the time how deficient he is. He says how he does no good works and how his deeds are not enough. What he means by all this is to make a display of his humility.

Whether or not he actually believes himself deficient, he goes on in this way until Satan makes him believe that he is free from showing off, when actually Satan has been accompanying him in his absurd display all along. What is needed for a person to be balanced, neither deprecating himself for public viewing, nor praising himself.

7. Bringing attention to the faults of others:

Satan can approach a person by way of the faults of others. By criticizing someone else's mistake, a person implies that he is free from the same.

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[22] *Sahîh Muslim* (2642).
[23] *Sahîh Muslim* (1431). *Musnad Ahmad* (7691).

A man might say: “You know – God forbid! – so-and-so never gets up at night to offer prayers!” *Translation*: “I pray at night.”

“I never saw such-and-such fast a day in his life.” *Translation*: “I fast a lot.”

“Whats-his-name never gives in charity, though he has much more money than I have.” *Translation*: “I am not like him. I give in charity.”

If this person had any sense, he would say as a poet once said:

Because of myself I weep, not because of others,
For myself, from myself. Bother the people!

Or maybe he should say as al-Shâfi`î said:

Let not your tongue mention the shame of another,
For you yourself are covered in shame and all men have tongues.

If your eye falls upon the sins of your brother,
Shield them and say: “O my eye! All men have eyes!”

Those who busy themselves with the shame of others have many specialized ways of backbiting at their disposal to help elevate them above those they criticize. Ibn Taymiyah, in his *Fatâwâ*[24], mentions a number of these:

One strategy is to frame one’s slander in the form of concern for the religion and for reform. Statements of the following sort ensue:

“Now, it is not my general practice to say anything but good about other people. I hate backbiting and lying. I only wish to inform you about this person.”

“I swear by Allah, he is a good man, but he does such-and-such.”

“We must pray for him. O Allah! Forgive us and forgive him.”

With these statements, a person can ridicule another while at the same time seeking to deceive Allah about what he is doing, as if that was possible.

Then there are those who belittle others just to make themselves look good. A person like this might say: “If only I prayed for him yesterday, I would not have heard this horrible thing about him today.” To make himself appear clever, someone might say: “So-and-so, you must understand, has a weak intellect.”

[24] These strategies employed by people for backbiting others can be found in *Majmû` al-Fatâwâ* (28/237).

Another person makes his slander of others appear in the form of jest, as if his only intention is to make people laugh. However, what he does in order to make his companions laugh is to ridicule another person, belittle him, and mock him.

Another uses amazement and astonishment as an excuse to say something bad about someone else. He might say: "I am startled that so-and-so does not do that!" or: "How it is that he can do such a thing!" In this way, the slanderer maligns the name of another with the excuse that he was overcome with amazement.

Someone else feigns concern or pity in order to get in his nasty remarks. He might say: "Poor so-and-so, I am so sorry about what happened to him. It is a pity what he got himself involved with." Someone who hears this might think the speaker is genuinely distraught about what happened to that person. In reality, though, he would probably increase that person's miseries if he was able to do so. He might even say these words in front of that person's enemies in order to give them the chance to take their revenge on him. This is a very serious sickness of the heart and a horrible form of deception.

Then there is the person who makes a show of anger and righteous indignation in order to backbite another. He may use the most eloquent words possible with the seeming intent of condemning an act of wrongdoing, but his true intentions are vile indeed.

8. Safeguarding one's status and reputation:

When a person becomes known for righteousness and piety, he tends to love building his reputation further in the same manner. He begins to fear losing the esteem of others that he presently enjoys. He guards himself from any apparent laxity in his conduct. He makes sure to keep pace with others or to outdo them in good works, at least publicly. He does not do this out of any religious devotion, but in order to earn respect.

He may speak to the people, preach to them, and exhort them to do what is right, not because he feels that they need it but because he feels that they expect it from him. The meaning of what he says is not his concern. It is only his reputation and status that matter.

This trap is a subtle one and an easy one to fall into. Actions are but by intentions. A person is either doing these things for Allah's sake – for which he will be rewarded – or merely to save his reputation.

9. Speaking about matters in a way that alludes to the idea that one is engaged in them:

A person might say the following: "If a worshipper recites the *Qur'ân* a lot, it becomes easy on his tongue, and he reads with more fluidity, especially when he prays late at night." *Translation*: "I did this act and had this experience."

Likewise, a person might say: "Some people think fasting is tiring and difficult." *Translation*: "I am in the habit of fasting."

A person's secret devotions can become public in this manner. A man says: "You know, so-and-so made the call for the Morning Prayer a half hour before its time." In this way, he reveals to everyone that he is in the habit of getting up early for prayers.

Let us look at how the scholars of old handled a similar situation. Sa`îd b. Jubayr asked his fellows: "Which of you saw the shooting star that went across the sky last night?"

Husayn b. `Abd al-Rahmân added: "I did." Then he quickly added: "I had not been praying; I had been stung by a scorpion."

The reason he mentioned that he had been stung by a scorpion was to dispel the obvious conclusion that his companions would come to: that he had been praying throughout the night. The early Muslims were very careful to avoid praising themselves and did not like mentioning their own virtues.

Those who mention such things in order to show off may earn the people's praise, but their deeds lose all blessings. If somebody makes such statements without the intention of showing off, then his secret devotions still become public. He will be rewarded for them, but the blessings of those devotions will be less.

10. Putting oneself on a pedestal:

A person embarks upon learning about a certain religious topic. He delves into it deeply, investigating every minor issue and every subtle detail. He commits whole texts to memory and learns the opinions of many authorities. Then, when he sits among a large number of people, he begins to speak. Of course, he speaks on that very topic that he investigated so thoroughly, rattling off the names of different scholars and what they had to say, giving every citation from memory, down to the page number. He pours out to them everything he has memorized. What is the reason for all of this? It is so people will point to him and call him a scholar.

He may have the pretension to use turns of phrase reserved for true people of knowledge. He might say things like:

"I see the matter to be such-and such…"

"What is quite evident to me is that …"

"The stance that we take on this issue is…"

He has the audacity to speak in the manner of an authority in the field, while he is a mere beginner. A poet writes:

They say: "This is, in our opinion, impermissible"
Who are you, though, to have an opinion?

11. Refuting the people of knowledge:

A person may be incited by Satan to speak badly about the people of knowledge or to try to refute and contradict them. His purpose in doing so is to make himself visible by standing upon their shoulders. He wants people to say that he refuted or dumbfounded a certain scholar. He wants the news to spread that he got into a debate with a certain prominent sheikh and overwhelmed him with his arguments.

He might succeed in bringing scholars down only to make himself more famous. While doing so, he might even offer a prayer for them to make a show of his affection and concern. He could say: "So-and-so – may Allah have mercy on him – said this and that."

He may even make a pretense of pity and compassion, saying: "Poor so-and-so, he has been afflicted with holding such an opinion."

Another approach he may use is to feign a desire not to talk about him. If someone mentions to him the name of a certain scholar, he might say: "I do not wish to get involved with discussing that person" or "Leave him alone. May Allah conceal both his faults and ours." or "Let us not talk about him. May Allah protect us from speaking badly about someone." This is a very subtle way of putting that scholar down. Only the astute actually realize what is going on.

12. Seeking knowledge to acquire fame:

A person may be incited by Satan to seek religious knowledge and to study it extensively with the sole purpose of becoming a *muftî* who people will come to with their questions, or a scholar whose name will go down in history, or maybe an Islamic activist who people will rally around.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) mentioned that three people would be the first on the Day of Resurrection to be scorched by the Hellfire. One of these three was: "…a man who acquired knowledge and taught it to others, who recited the *Qur'ân*. He will be summoned and asked what he did during his lifetime. He will say: 'I acquired knowledge and taught it to others and I recited the *Qur'ân* for your sake.' Allah will tell him: 'You lie! You only acquired knowledge so people would call you a scholar and read the *Qur'ân* so you would be acclaimed as a *Qur'ân* reciter. These things were indeed said about you.' At this point an order will be given and this man will be dragged on his face and cast into Hell." The others mentioned in this *hadîth* were a man who fought in Allah's cause and a man who gave in charity, both with the intention of showing off.[25]

A person like this, once he acquires the fame and status that he desires, will be approached with the people's questions. There will be times where he will not know the answer. At these times when he should admit he does not know, he will instead fear the people and worry about their opinion of him. He will not want them to say: "How come you don't know the answer and you are supposed to be such a learned person?" For this

[25] *Sahîh Muslim* (1905).

reason, he will make something up and answer in ignorance. He will in this way misguide himself and others.

Once a man of knowledge ascended the pulpit and was asked a question. He answered: "I don't know."

One of the people in attendance spoke up and said: "The pulpit is not a place for 'I don't know'!"

To this the man of knowledge said: "I have ascended to this position where I am with the knowledge that I possess. If I were to ascend on par with my ignorance, I would reach the sky."

Imam Mâlik once said: "Whenever a scholar abandons saying 'I don't know', then he has met with destruction."

13. Feigning humility:

Satan may incite a person to make a pretentious show of modesty and humbleness. He will clasp his hands together, raise his shoulders, and lower his head in an insincere and inordinate display of submissiveness. Often the behaviors exhibited in these displays go against the *Sunnah* of Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him).

`Abd Allah al-Qurashî relates that `Umar b. al-Khattâb once saw a young man lowering his head in prayer. `Umar said to him: "Raise your head. Humbleness does not increase on what is actually in the heart. Whenever people make their humbleness visible, they are just making a visible display of hypocrisy.[26]

The *Sunnah* of how the worshipper should carry himself in prayer is well known. The correct thing for the worshipper to do is to focus his eyes on the place where his forehead will go in prostration. His hands should be folded over his chest or his diaphragm with the right hand covering the left. This is the position of the majority of scholars and is the one mentioned in the hadîth related by Wâ'il b. Hajar, which is the most authentic *hadîth* in this regard.[27] The worshipper should be balanced and moderate in standing, sitting, bowing, and prostrating, as this is the guidance of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

Satan might sometimes come to a reciter of the *Qur'ân* and encourage him to cry during his recitation with the notion of making the listeners feel humbled before his recitation and to inspire them to weep as well. Yet, the larger the congregation, the more he cries, until he comes to a point where he can hardly recite.

Then we have the supplication known as the *qunût* made by the imam in Ramadân at the end of the prayer. We can see and hear amazing things happening during this

[26] Al-Daynûrî, *al-Majâlisah* (1692, 3434).
[27] *Sahîh Ibn Khuzaymah* (479). The hadîth can also be found in *Sahîh Muslim* (401) without mention being made of placing the hands on the chest.

supplication. Tears are summoned up and wept out in torrents by a person who may have just finished reading the most powerful, fearsome, and awe inspiring verses of the *Qur'ân* without being moved in the least. So how is it that when he comes to the supplication of the *qunût*, we begin to hear loud cries and sobs?

Ibn Jawzî devotes a chapter to this type of showing off in his superb book entitled *Talbîs Iblîs* (The Devil's Deception). He writes:

> **Chapter: The Devil's deception through false humility, lowering of the head, and establishing law**
>
> If fear embeds itself in the heart, the body will show it. Such a person will not even be able to conceal his feelings. What is reprehensible is for a person to make an effort to show humility, induce crying, and visibly hang his head in order to appear like an ascetic and have people come up to him to take his hand or kiss it or beseech him to pray for them. He prepares himself for supplication as if he can bring down an answer from heaven.
>
> We have mentioned how Ibrâhîm al-Nakha`î, the prominent student of the Companions, used to detest it when people asked him to make a prayer for them.
>
> Some people display so much fear that it makes them very shy and submissive, unable to raise their faces to the sky. This is not a virtue, because there is no humility greater than that shown by Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him). In *Sahîh Muslim*, there is the *hadîth* of Abû Mûsâ al-Ash`arî where he says that Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) used to often raise his head to the sky.[28] This *hadîth* shows that turning one's face to the sky is a recommended practice for the sake of drawing lessons from the signs in its creation. Allah says: "Do they not look at the sky above them, how We made it and adorned it and there are no flaws in it?" [*Sûrah Qâf*: 6] He also says: "Say: Look at what is in the heavens and on Earth." [*Sûrah Yûnus*:10 101]. This shows the falsehood of those Sufis who go years without ever looking at the sky out of what they claim to be a show of humility.
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> Abû Salamah b. `Abd al-Rahmân said: "The Companions of Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) were neither deviant nor were they like dead people. They used to recite poetry in their gatherings and talk about the times of ignorance. However, if you were to attack any one of them in matters of religion, his eyes would become like those of a madman."
>
> Kahmas b. al-Husayn relates that a man in the company of `Umar breathed sighing breaths as if he was trying to show grief, so `Umar struck him.
>
> `Âsim b. Kulayb al-Jarmî relates: "My father met with `Abd al-Rahmân b. al-Aswad who had a habit of walking along the side of the wall out of false humility.

[28] *Sahîh Muslim* (2531).

My father said to him: 'What is it with you that you walk against the wall like that? I swear by Allah, when `Umar walked, he planted his feet firmly on the ground. He made his voice heard when he spoke."

Abû Khaythamah relates that al-Shifâ bint `Abd Allah saw some young people walking meekly and speaking slowly. She asked them: "What is this?"

They replied: "We are ascetics."

To this she said: "I swear by Allah, when `Umar spoke he made himself heard, and when he walked he walked briskly, and when he hit someone, he inflicted pain. And he was an ascetic for real."[29]

14. Overemphasizing certain conspicuous works, even to the point of going against the Sunnah:

Some people become fixated on a certain type of work to the point where Satan can incite them on account of it to go against the *Sunnah* or to violate Islamic law.

Take jihad for instance, since some of our young people today have become very interested in it. No doubt it is a great act of devotion. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "There are one hundred levels in Paradise that Allah has prepared for those who engage in jihad for the cause of Allah. The distance between any two levels is like the distance between the sky and the Earth."[30] He also said that the pinnacle of Islam is jihad in the way of Allah.[31]

Allah makes jihad the greatest of works when he says: "Do you consider the giving of drink to the pilgrims or the maintenance of the Sacred Mosque equal to the service of those who believe in Allah and the Last Day and strive with might and main in the cause of Allah? They are not equal in the sight of Allah; and Allah guides not those who do wrong. Those who believe and emigrate and strive with might and main in Allah's cause with their wealth and their lives have the highest rank in the sight of Allah. They are the people who shall achieve success. Their Lord gives them glad tidings of mercy from Himself, of His good pleasure, and of Gardens for them wherein are delights that endure. They will dwell therein forever. Verily with Allah is a great reward." [*Sûrah al-Tawbah*: 19-22]

The gate of jihad is one of the greatest gates of Paradise, but jihad has its causes, its rules, and its conditions. A person who wishes to participate in jihad should learn the laws regarding it. He should learn how, where, and when to engage in jihad. He should know under whose banner he should fight. Moreover, such a person must first engage in a personal jihad to purify his intention. How many people are killed in the ranks of the believers and Allah alone knows their intentions. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

[29] Ibn al-Jawzî, *Talbîs Iblîs* (280-283). Al-Minbariyyah Publishers.
[30] *Sahîh al-Bukhârî* (2790).
[31] *Musnad Ahmad* (21542). *Sunan al-Tirmidhî* (2616). *Sunan Ibn Mâjah* (3973).

"Whoever fights so that the word of Allah is the highest word, he is the one who has fought in the cause of Allah."[32]

A man had fought along with the Prophet (peace be upon him) until he was slain. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "I saw him in the Hellfire."[33] Later, he mentioned that he saw the man being punished in a cloak that he had stolen.

Then there is the case of another man who fought alongside the Prophet (peace be upon him). He was severely wounded and in agony, so he placed the base of his sword on the ground and its point against his chest. Then he killed himself by falling upon it until it came out through his back. The Prophet (peace be upon him) informed his Companions that that man was in the Hellfire.

Therefore, it is of utmost importance that we purify our intentions and acquire the requisite knowledge before engaging in such work.

We have seen the children of the Islamic Awakening going fourth in ranks into the fiercest of fighting. They have demonstrated the utmost heroism, bravery, and mastery over the world. We saw the young men who had lived lives of recreation and comfort, pull themselves away from it suddenly, departing their lives of leisure and luxury and the places of fun and games, looking for death in the cause of Allah in the mountains and ravines of places like Afghanistan, Palestine, Chechnya, and Bosnia. We have books and cassettes filled with their many heroic stories.

This shows the truth of what the Prophet (peace be upon him) said when he informed us that jihad would be going on until the Final Hour, despite all the changing circumstances and despite how much the Muslims might lag behind in the world. He said: "There is no emigration after the conquest of Mecca but there is jihad and intention. If you are called upon to fight, then go forth."[34]

At the same time, it should be known that jihad requires the express permission of one's parents. Some of our young men, unfortunately, leave for jihad without first receiving their permission. When the Prophet (peace be upon him) was asked which deed was most beloved to Allah, he said: "Prayer on its time." Then when asked what came next, he said: "Honoring one's parents." Then when asked what came next, he said: "Jihad in Allah's cause."[35]

The Prophet (peace be upon him) placed honoring one's parents before jihad. Once a man came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and sought his permission to participate in jihad. The Prophet (peace be upon him) asked him if his parents were living. When the

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[32] *Sahîh al-Bukhârî* (123, 2810). *Sahîh Muslim* (1904).
[33] *Sahîh Muslim* (114).
[34] *Sahîh al-Bukhârî* (2783,2825). *Sahîh Muslim* (1353).
[35] *Sahîh al-Bukhârî* (527). *Sahîh Muslim* (85).

man replied in the affirmative, the Prophet (peace be upon him) told him: "Your jihad is in serving them."[36]

On another occasion a man approached the Prophet (peace be upon him) and said: "O Messenger of Allah! I have come because I want to go in jihad along with you and seek the countenance of Allah and the abode of the Hereafter. I have come and left my parents weeping."

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Go back to them and make them laugh just as you have made them weep."[37]

Satan entices people to go against Allah's Law in this way. For instance, he tricks some people by beautifying a given Islamic duty, though other Islamic duties may be more serious, goading him on with it until he abandons those more important duties. He might deceive a person into thinking that some work is an individual duty on every Muslim, when in fact the decision to engage in such duties is one of those difficult matters that requires the discretion of qualified people of knowledge. This person may even be deceived into condemning those who do not participate in the same works.

It is possible for one of these people to start talking to others about his experiences while engaged in jihad, mentioning things that he saw and did and talking about miracles that he had experienced, though such events may never have actually taken place. I saw someone who had his hand bound up and who claimed that he had been shot in the hand during a battle. When his matter was investigated more closely, it turned out that it was all a charade.

The scholars of the early generations – the *Salaf* – were the strictest people in guarding against the tendency to show off, especially when it came to jihad.

`Abdah b. Sulayman al-Marwazî relates: "We went on an expedition against the Romans. A Roman who was very strong and severe came forth. No Muslim could draw near him without being struck down by his sword. The Muslims became very afraid of him. Then a shrouded man went to attack that Roman, striking him with his sword until he cut through him. He then hurried back to the military camp. I followed him and opened his shroud to find that it was none other than the great philanthropist and eminent scholar of *Hadîth* and Law, `Abd Allah b. al-Mubârak! He became very angry about what I did and said: 'Even you defame us!'" (`Abd Allah b. al-Mubarak meant by this that the man made his identity and his deeds known to the public) Look at how he tried to conceal his good deeds. See as well how `Abd Allah b. al-Mubârak was able to join together many types of good works, like acquiring knowledge, fighting in jihad, and spending in charity.

[36] *Sahîh al-Bukhârî* (3009). *Sahîh Muslim* (2549).
[37] *Sunan Abî Dâwûd* (2528). *Sunan al-Nasâ'î* (7/143). *Sunan Ibn Mâjah* (2728). The *hadîth* is authentic (*sahîh*)

15. Making a show of religious zeal:

A pious person begins to talk about sinners. He speaks at length, describing, nit picking, and bewailing. He might even go so far as to curse people and threaten them. He exaggerates matters to the extreme as if he is trying to say: "I am very zealous about the sanctity of the religion. I am righteously indignant when it comes to my Lord, the Prophet (peace be upon him) and the believers" What he does not realize is that the way he is showing off is a far graver sin than many of the sins that he is discussing and condemning so viciously.

16. Conspicuously neglecting one's outward appearance:

This is one of the most subtle ways of falling into the sin of showing off. Satan might inspire an individual to go about with disheveled hair and humble attire and make an ostentatious display of asceticism and humility. The *Sunnah*, on the other hand, encourages a person to care about his appearance. The Prophet (peace be upon him) used to take good care of his hair. He would comb it and apply scent to it. It is, however, related that the Prophet (peace be upon him) used to forbid people from oiling their hair excessively.[38]

It is also related that he said: "Whoever has hair should honor it."[39]

It is befitting for an Islamic worker to dress nicely, be tidy, take care of his hair, stay presentable, and smell nice. He should keep his hair combed and nicely arranged. He should take care of his appearance without going overboard and wasting his time on it.

17. Making a display of lowering one's gaze:

A person can make turning away from something into a conspicuous act. When a man sees a pretty woman or some other sight that a Muslim should divert his eyes from, he not only diverts his eyes but lowers his head or turns away. Now, this is not necessary. All that is required from him is to divert his gaze. He does not have to make a big show of it. Such behavior is pretentious. It may be that Satan causes this same individual to continue to sneak discreet glances.

Allah says: "Allah knows the treachery of the eyes and all that the hearts conceal." [*Sûrah Ghâfir*: 19]

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[38] *Musnad Ahmad* (16793). *Sunan al-Tirmidhî* (1756). *Sunan Abî Dâwûd* (4159). *Sunan al-Nasâ'î* (5055). Al-Tirmidhî declared it a good and authentic *hadîth*. (*hasan sahîh*)

[39] *Sunan Abî Dâwûd* (4163). *Mustadrak al-Hâkim* (8485). Al-Manâwî discusses this *hadîth* in *Fayd al-Qadîr* (11439), saying: "(Al-Suyuti) indicates that it is a good *hadîth*. This comes originally from Ibn Hajar who writes in *Fath al-Bârî* that it's chain of transmission is good. The *hadîth* is also supported by a hadîth of `Â'ishah found in *al-Ghaylâniyât*, which also has a good chain of transmission.

18. Abandoning one's worship from fear of falling into hypocrisy:

Among the most serious of problems is when Satan fools somebody into abandoning his worship of Allah to avoid being a hypocrite or being called one. Take, for example, a reciter of the *Qur'ân*, a teacher, or an Islamic worker who falls into some unseen sinful acts on some occasions, like looking at someone unlawfully. Such a person should repent to Allah and try to avoid falling into the sin again. Satan, though, does not give up that easy. He suggests to that person that he is a hypocrite, since he presents an image of piety to the people but commits sins in secret.

Now, Satan is not going to suggest as a solution that the person should strive to overcome his sins and rectify himself. Instead, Satan encourages him to give up the good works that he is doing and to forsake the company of righteous people. He encourages him to give up teaching others and leading prayers. His argument is that it is not fitting for that individual to do such outwardly good deeds while sinning inwardly. Satan may say to him something like: "If the people know what you do when you are alone, they would spit in your face and avoid you like the plague." Satan keeps at him like this until he gives up doing any good deeds.

Allah says: "And establish regular prayers at the two ends of the day and at the approaches of the night. Indeed, good works remove evil deeds. This is a reminder for those who are mindful." [*Sûrah Hûd*: 114]

19. Withdrawing from the company of others and going into seclusion:

A person may turn away from the company of his fellow men and eschew their company because he thinks he is better than they are. If he had, on the other hand, decided to avoid others so they could be safe from his harm and abuse, he may have had a point. This is what Imam Ahmad did when he limited his interactions with others at the end of his life. People said to him: "O Imam! It is being said that you are renouncing the company of others."

Imam Ahmad replied: "Who am I to renounce other people? Quite the contrary, it is the people who are renouncing my company."

It is wrong to renounce the company of people out of a sense of superiority to them. This is nothing but pride and arrogance. It is a way of praising oneself. In a *hadîth* it is related: "Whoever says: 'The people are in ruination!' is the most ruined of the lot."[40]

20. Being deceived by some fleeting act of devotion:

Satan can trick a person into thinking that some singular act of devotion, like shedding pious tears, is good enough to suffice him. Some people bring themselves to weep during prayer in the nights of Ramadân – and maybe only one night out of the year – or maybe

[40] *Sahîh Muslim* (2623).

they will attend the *Tarâwîh* prayer, then Satan convinces them that this made up for everything wrong that they have so far committed. In this way, he encourages them to keep up their sinful ways.

We ask Allah to protect us all from the wiles of Satan and from this special type of polytheism that he likes to cultivate in our hearts. We seek refuge with Allah from the evils of ourselves and our deeds.

CONCLUSION

We hope that we have made plain some of the ways the sin of showing off can sneak up on a person and make his deeds bereft of blessings. We hope from Allah that he blesses us with true sincerity and protects us from polytheism and from showing off, whether we do it consciously or unconsciously. Allah is the only one who can help us.

We conclude by saying: Praise be to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds. And may Allah's peace and blessings be upon our Prophet Muhammad and upon all his family and Companions and upon those who follow their good way until the Day of Judgment.